

## **Next: Pastoral Succession That Works**

### **By William Vanderbloemen and Warren Bird**

Every pastor is an interim pastor.

The intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional leader to another. Succession is when one senior leader intentionally transitions and hands over leadership to another.

As the variety of successions in Scripture illustrate, our universal recommendation about succession is that there is no universal recommendation.

It is also a deeply spiritual process that calls for prayer and recognition of God's leading.

Equating succession planning with retirement planning is a major error in perception. Pastoral succession is not primarily about retirement. Retirement is often only a final step in a series of pastoral successions.

"No matter how long I stay at this church, I am just an interim pastor. So I have done everything possible to lay a solid foundation for what will happen once my time here is done."

Wisdom consists of the anticipation of consequences. Norman Cousins

One trend we've noticed is that the right person to succeed is often the one who has been prepared elsewhere.

Effective leaders plan ahead for the time when they can no longer lead, and they prayerfully prepare for that day.

Leaders understand that there is no success without a successor. No one wins when transitions don't go well.

God does use people and systems in conjunction with the Holy Spirit to help build leadership teams in the church.

Succession is a process, not an event. It's a leadership value and practice.

While every church is unique and no two pastoral successions follow an identical pattern, a few common denominators emerge. The process will be messy. Your process will be unpredictable in ways that predecessors, successors, leadership boards, and congregations do not fully anticipate. It won't take the amount of time you think. Some successions take longer than planned (more common), while some move more quickly (less common). The process will almost always be healthier and more effective if an objective third party speaks into the process. This could include a denomination, judicatory, or district; a search firm; or an objective trained consultant. Pastoral transition is not over when a new pastor's tenure officially begins. There is still transition work to be done during the first leg of any new pastor's appointment. The complete process typically takes two to three years from that point.

Early planning produces higher-quality planning. Succession planning becomes better when done as a team, validating the Scripture that says there is wisdom in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11: 14; 15: 22). Succession clarity requires time to develop. Succession planning is oftentimes like old Polaroid film. It develops before your eyes over time. Give succession planning additional time, and you will have a clearer picture of what's needed as the time for transition draws near. The earlier you plan, the more likely you are to succeed. Advance planning leads to better outcomes. Those churches that periodically review their succession plan tend to do a better job with succession once the actual day comes.

#### The "Ten Commandments" of Preparing for Succession

1. Read this book with others.
2. Set a healthy pace for the long run. If
3. Prepare an "emergency envelope."

On the church side, how prepared is your congregation if that bus should take your life or incapacitate you for an extended season? Is the church prepared by knowing who would be in charge in the first hours of your absence? Who would preach on the initial Sundays? Who would carry out your key duties?

4. Develop a plan for a nonemergency but unforeseen departure.

Does your church have a plan for how to handle a vacancy outside of your emergency plan? Who would determine how a search team would be created? Have you developed internal candidates from your current staff or perhaps from a key volunteer? Do you have a short list of people who might be candidates to replace you, such as one of your teaching team, a favorite guest speaker, sons/ daughters of the church now serving elsewhere, or previous associate pastors?

5. Anticipate your (eventual) retirement.
6. Annually evaluate the state of your succession plan.
7. Create a broad culture of leadership development.

A church-wide culture of leadership development will not only help your church in its current mission but will also help develop potential future successors.

8. Share the teaching.

Creating a culture where the church isn't dependent on one communicator will mitigate the damage of a sudden departure of the pastor.

9. Share the leading.

The senior pastor should identify key staff with potential for higher levels of leadership and be intentional about mentoring them to participate regularly in senior-level decisions.

10. Look beyond the baton pass.

Larry shifted to the role of an initiating and directional leader.

The congregation, spread across three campuses for this multisite church, recognizes both men as directional leaders.

For Pastors: Which of the “Ten Commandments of Succession Planning” do you think you are doing the best job with, and which one needs the most improvement? For Boards: What steps have you taken and what next three steps can you take to help your pastor manage a healthy pace of life in ministry?

What would happen if pastors would focus some of their thinking on what happens after they are no longer pastor?

To address that question of legacy thinking, three key issues must be sorted through. Developing sound answers can free pastors to go to new levels as they deal with the big picture of legacy. 1. Define succession success. What would a successful hand-off look like and how do I achieve it? What do I need to do now to prepare for passing the leadership baton? 2. Identify life passion. What should I do next? Is my next stop a similar role in another church? If not, in light of how God has made me and the opportunities before me, what area would I love to pour my energy into after my time at this church is over? 3. Determine financial need. Stated positively, are my household finances in order so I’m free to go when and where God calls me? Stated negatively, how can I make sure finances don’t keep me hanging on to my present role (and its salary) longer than I should? All three questions help set the tone for a pastoral succession because they help all parties set expectations. They help clear the air of any premature assumptions about what kind of outcome is best.

My measure of success in ministry was going to be based on whether the congregation was continuing to grow and thrive five years after I was out of the pilot’s seat.”

A second issue to explore involves the question of “What’s next?” for the outgoing pastor.

Called nxtSTP (text jargon for “Next Step”), the ministry is designed to motivate those in the second half of life, boomers and beyond, to use their expertise and vitality to give back to the community.

“Pastors need to be encouraged and given the opportunity to explore other interests that may lead to future ministry endeavors, even while they are still in their current role. They should have permission to wrestle with questions such as ‘What’s a ministry I’ve always wanted to start?’ or ‘Where is a place I’ve wanted to serve, but I’ve never had the time or opportunity?’ And then, simply granting them extended time off to take a class, go on a mission trip, or volunteer with an agency might be all that is needed for them to find a new place to invest themselves and make an impact.”

How will you fund your life after retirement? Where will you spend your energy after retirement? How will you plan for your succession in a way that history will judge as successful?

A person’s greatest strength, when unguarded, can become that same person’s greatest weakness.

In ministry, a pastor’s confidence— one of the qualities God uses to build a church— can become one of the biggest obstacles to pastoral succession.

“Stay, because this church still needs you,” or “You’ve been here so long that you can do things a newcomer couldn’t,” or even “This church owes a great debt to you that you need to receive and cherish here.”

“How do we tell Pastor that we think it’s time to consider a change?” So how do you know when your time has come to let go?

## Different Types of Succession

Emergency. Unforeseen, sudden, often crisis-laden successions that can include death or other tragic events are one of the following: Short-term: A temporary, unplanned absence that arises unexpectedly and is projected to last for three months or less. Long-term: A temporary, unplanned absence that arises unexpectedly and is projected to last more than three months. Permanent: A permanent absence is when the pastor will not be returning to the position. Disqualified. Sometimes a pastor is no longer qualified to be pastor of a church. Reasons can include: Moral failure: Most disqualifications stem from moral failure. The majority involve abuse of sex, money, and/ or power. Some involve serious breaking of the law or other major improprieties. Doctrinal heresy or deviation from accepted biblical standards: This includes pastors whose approach to ministry shifts drastically enough that they are no longer a fit for their church. Loss of physical core competencies: Sometimes disqualification relates to loss of energy, vision, preaching ability, or other physical core competencies required for the role of pastor. Forced. Whether or not the term is used, the pastor has been fired. (A significant portion of chapter 13 addresses forced terminations.) Expected. Expected successions are largely the focus of this book. They include: Ministry transition: Sometimes church and pastor partner together on a new ministry venture. It can involve any number of roles the pastor might shift to, e.g., church planter, missionary, seminary professor, chaplain, interim pastor (at other churches), mentor to other pastors, or author. Church rotation: The bishop reappoints the pastor to another church or the pastor accepts a call to a “next step” church. Retirement: In many cases, retirement is long planned, but sometimes circumstances prompt a short countdown to retirement, whether partial or full. Partial retirement may involve shifting to a new role in the existing church, such as visitation pastor, mission pastor, or senior adult pastor.

When should your succession planning begin?

How do you assess your standing in terms of whether it’s time to move on? You calculate how your defeats compare to your victories as viewed by the congregation. Then you take it to God.

In the end, most of the success of a pastoral transition rises and falls on the shoulders of the outgoing pastor.

Will the coming generation leave the “success” of their ministries for a different path far earlier than traditional patterns of career and retirement?

## Reasons Pastors Move On

- Souls with a holy discontent who do not stay anywhere for long.
- Runners.
- Burnout victims.
- Pastors who change.
- Pastors who thrive better at planting than maintaining.
- Leaders with a mismatched call.

Pastors who are outgrown by their congregation. Sometimes pastors lead a church to grow, only to realize that the new pastoral role required in a larger church is not a good match for their heart, spirit, and gifts. They decide to relocate for the good of the church. This is not necessarily a bad or unwise decision. Over time most leaders come to understand their personal “church size capacity.” Sometimes

described as the “Peter Principle,” this means that people rise or get promoted to or beyond the limit of their adaptive competence. 9 When leaders take a church to the maximum of their ability, then it’s usually best for the church, the leader, and the kingdom of God to relocate to another church to start the growth cycle over again.

- Pastors who shift to a new ministry paradigm and depart to avoid causing division in their churches.
- Pastors with private family issues.
- Pastors with a lack of self-awareness.

#### Essentials If You Do Stay in the Church

- Agreement.
- Check-in.
- Specific niche.
- Write it down.
- Have a long, clarifying talk with your spouse and family.

“Pastoral succession” we offered in the preface (page 10): the intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional leader to another.

His model looks at how the church actually works rather than at the idealized state of where a church would like to be. To uncover the system of how things get done, he looks at power structures, asking: who holds the decision-making power for major decisions?

Each succession style (or model) is based on how the church’s culture best matches two leadership issues depicted in the following figure: Left to right (x axis) looks at the level of a church’s programming that directly involves the church’s senior leadership. This moves from complex (left) to apparent simplicity (right), depending on how the church’s programs are structured and supervised. Top to bottom (y axis) explores the location of power and decision-making. This moves from group-based (top) to individual-based (bottom), depending on the level of teams, boards, committees, and systems that must work together to keep the church moving forward.

#### Senior Pastor as Key Administrator

#### Senior Pastor as Executive

High complexity in the amount of the church’s programming that directly involves the church’s senior leadership and more individual than group orientation in terms of the level of teams, boards, committees, and systems that must work together to keep the church moving forward. Almost all the seeker churches fit here, especially those that are now “second generation”— led not by the founding pastor but by someone who has followed that person.

#### Senior Pastor as Chief of Chiefs

In this model, power is in a small group of chiefs where each one runs not only an area of the church but has prominence over other pastors and staff.

## Senior Pastor as Head of “Royal Household”

What can founding pastors do today to have the highest likelihood that their churches will continue after they depart?

They too face the huge challenge of how to not lose momentum or vitality when they step aside and someone else follows them.

Successions from first-generation leaders to second-generation leaders are the least likely to go well.

The reality is that the outgoing founder is often a bigger part of the problem than the solution.

Every church leader can identify the measurements that matter most for their context. For some it's baptisms, others salvation decisions, others attendance, others small group participation, others missionaries supported, and for still others congregational involvement in the surrounding community—

Why do founding and long-term pastors stay far too long even when the church's effectiveness is clearly in decline? Chapter 3 raised three important issues that are foundational to all successions and that give us their possible reasons.

No clear picture of what success would look like in a succession No idea what might be the next personal step upon leaving Lacking a sound financial base to feel safe in leaving

Unwillingness to face the emotional sense of loss.

Hope that they can do it again.

Fear that all they've done will be lost under the next person.

Fear of the unknown.

Waiting on the right potential successor.

Enjoyment of the comfort level they've achieved. Entitlement.

After a season, the weight of carrying the burdens, fears, hopes, and dreams of the people of God can become too much. The pastor cannot carry the church forward, and it's time to let someone else do so.

Have I stayed too long? Am I still the leader this ministry needs? Should my church have a mandatory retirement age?

By contrast, the second-generation leader comes into an existing organization. The momentum has already happened and is hopefully continuing to happen.

“Often they are more team-oriented and people-oriented.” They're more collaborative and interactive. They like to exchange ideas with their team. They want players who help shape the vision.

## Seven Surprises about Succession

God is in control and can transform even the most challenging situations into kingdom gain.

Nearly everything rides on the back of the outgoing senior pastor.

If the outgoing pastor behaves well and appropriately supports the incoming pastor, almost any succession has the potential to work.

New pastors shouldn't dismiss the leadership and staff they inherited before taking a long look at them for the future.

A perfect state is not required.

Succession might involve not calling a new senior pastor.

All successions are unique.

Bylaws about your incoming pastor should reflect qualities that your incoming pastor must have, not just your desires.

After looking at the underbelly of many churches, we have been reminded of a clear truth: church staffs are all made up of people who need a Savior. Working with churches on succession day in and day out makes us more keenly aware than ever that the church is not staffed with super humans; all people in the church, from followers to leaders, are broken sinners for whom Christ died. What God started, he will complete (Phil. 1: 6). And no matter how dire your church situation seems, the ultimate Senior Pastor and Good Shepherd (John 10: 14; 1 Pet. 5: 4) has seen it coming and can see you through, not somehow but triumphantly.

#### Lessons Learned from the Crystal Cathedral Story

Every church is only one generation away from extinction.

Today's success formulas can poison tomorrow's succession.

High-control people have a hard time letting go.

Leaders must address their own ego before and during a succession planning process to ensure a successful hand-off.

Hard conversations about succession often need to be scheduled in advance.

Succession conversations should start sooner than most would guess.

Senior pastors should spend more time developing the strength of their bench to create a potential leadership pipeline for every major leadership position within the church.

Succession typically takes longer than most would guess.

Churches, especially high-visibility ones, may not need ten years to develop the next senior pastor, but they do probably need ten years to cultivate a strong culture of leadership development at all levels.

The more visible the church, the greater care should be given to public communication.

Talking about succession is a lot easier than actually doing it.

Outgoing pastors must decrease so that incoming pastors can increase.

Pay attention to the outgoing spouse.

Written covenants trump verbal intentions.

Everything rises and falls on the outgoing pastor.

Some were “the” church in their region for effective Sunday school, others for ministry to single adults, others for small groups, others for community transformation, and others as an advocate for justice, serving as the moral conscience of their cities. Yet something happened in each as the disciple-making momentum and voice once gained was gradually lost.

The vast majority of the churches mentioned in the New Testament do not exist today and didn’t even seem to have lasted long after the close of the first century.

In other words, you’re dead but you could live again. This piece of Bible history raises the question of whether churches are destined to hit a peak and then never to sustain or return to it again. In other words, do churches have inherent limits to their life cycles? More specifically, how does pastoral succession contribute to that ebb and flow over time, and how can good successions increase or restart a church’s vitality along its life cycle?

“Should our church have a long-term future?”

Churches tend to follow a life cycle of birth to eventual death unless they interrupt and restart that cycle. It can be done, but “gravity” is against them. 12 The typical stages for a church are birth, growth, adulthood and maturity, a period of aging, and then death —or redevelopment.

We’ve seen far too many instances where a church that was once growing, agile, and able to change begins slowly to calcify. They underestimate their need to intentionally remain flexible. They overestimate their ability to undertake change.

Three major issues need to be addressed: where the church currently is, what the church can do to remain flexible, and what the church can do to prepare for coming change.

The current state of the church’s flexibility needs to be clearly and honestly defined for all parties.

It’s important to remember that pastors and congregations each have a personal life cycle that influences the church’s corporate life cycle.



One of a pastor's main roles is to mentor and develop leaders, and the real test of true leadership is found in the third generation— those who succeed the current generation that's being developed.

"Jesus linked discipleship to leadership development, and therefore we have built intentional discipleship training in everything we do,"

"The longer I delay the transition, the shorter a runway my successors would have to successfully transit to the third generation."

Looking ahead is one of the most difficult tasks people face.

Leaders who look way down the road come out winners more often than not.

If churches and pastors will enter their chapter of ministry thinking about and planning for multiple generations of health, the life span of congregations will lengthen and the kingdom of God will be the better for it.

Nothing brings harsh and constant media attention like a leader's hypocrisy, especially sexual hypocrisy.

Successions are messy enough in crisis, but especially when clear policies and procedures are not in place.

Smart churches will learn to keep an eye on the body and its leader for theological or philosophical drift over the years, lest they find themselves with a leader who doesn't match their DNA.

The public knows and remembers only one thing about the outgoing pastor— a few words from just a few of hundreds of sermons he preached.

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Messy endings almost always result, at least in part, from clouded decisions made by tired leaders. Write out three new steps toward maintaining your patterns of daily, weekly, and seasonal (perhaps annual) rest. Share this list with a colleague, family, and, ideally, a board member.

The phrases unintentional interim and sacrifice pastor are commonly used in discussions about pastors who do not survive the shadow cast by their predecessor.

The new pastor can do no wrong, the new pastor can do no right, and the new pastor leaves. In other words, what happens to cause a succession to become transitional rather than lasting?

"During that crucial first year it is possible to help people become aware of new possibilities, to begin to grasp a new vision and to help them look down a new road, but there is a limit on how many changes can be accomplished during the first year." 3

Earning the trust of your predecessor. One of the most heralded examples in recent years of a highly successful succession is the hand-off between Bob Russell and Dave Stone at Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky. Bob wrote it up in a very readable book, *Transition Plan: Seven Secrets*

Every Leader Needs to Know. 4 Bob and Dave, sometimes along with Kyle Idleman, have likewise spoken frequently on the lessons learned through the process. 5 One thread of their story is that Bob cultivated several preaching associates, one of whom— Dave— received wide affirmation as a potential successor. After a season of prayerful discernment and then intentional overlap between Bob and Dave, the official transition happened. One of Dave's early tasks was likewise to cultivate a number-two preacher as he began developing potential successions for down the road, or for an emergency hit-by-a-bus scenario. One of those leading preachers was Kyle Idleman. As Dave and Kyle worked under Bob, he recognized their effectiveness, maturity, and potential for even greater impact. "One reason I left Southeast . . . when I did was because I sensed that if I stayed much longer, the church would lose the opportunity for Dave Stone and Kyle Idleman to lead them," he wrote after the succession. "These men were both capable and eager to lead. It would have been unfair to ask them to wait any longer. I concluded that the church would do better in the long term if I stepped aside."

### Why Someone Becomes the Unintentional Interim

Toxic situations.

Change comes too fast.

Ignorance of transition dynamics, low emotional intelligence, and/ or lack of self-awareness.

Bad cultural fit.

Bad personality match.

Bad gift match.

Lack of connection with the church's opinion leaders. As consultant Lyle Schaller says, "The recently arrived minister must earn the confidence, the trust, and perhaps even the passive support of the influential members of the congregation— including some who do not hold official office, but who possess permission-withholding power; such as local patriarchs."

Not enough allies.

Lack of confidence and certainty of call.

Clergy-killer congregation.

"I had to stop drawing my sense of identity from my performance," Randy reflected. "If I could just trust in my position in Christ, the entire congregation and I could together do more for the kingdom— and in the process have a lot more fun with a lot less stress." 19 Indeed, he had already begun doing just that, kicking it off (literally) with a humorous visual picture to the congregation. Visiting the church shortly before it hired him, Randy publicly addressed what many recognized as the elephant in the room. Six inches shorter than Max Lucado, Randy asked him to come on stage. The two tried on each other's shoes, to no avail. Point made. A standing ovation ensued. "If I come, Max is going to be Max. And I'm going to be Randy," he said then. "And we are going to stand side by side and partner together in this deal. . . . People want to believe in their ministers, that human beings can pull this off." 20 Every arriving pastor will one day be a departing pastor. It's not a question of if, but when.

Succession is made much easier whenever the outgoing pastors have (a) a clearly defined identity they are passionate about pursuing post-pastorate and (b) adequate financial security. Forced succession threatens both pieces of that puzzle. Outgoing pastors are often left (a) questioning their sense of self-worth and (b) challenged by their lack of net worth financially.

“People will remember how you leave long after they forget what you did while you were there.”

What are the different pathways by which a pastor’s reluctant or unwilling resignation can be secured?

Intense and appropriate prayer leads a pastor to resign.

The board sets expectations early.

The board encourages the pastor to find a new identity and move toward it.

The board asks a search firm to help the pastor discern a new identity.

The board pays for its pastor to become a certified interim pastor as a graceful exit plan.

The board forecasts to the pastor that a forced retirement or termination may happen.

The board votes to release the pastor but negotiates it quietly behind closed doors.

Denominational leadership steps in to release the pastor.

The congregation votes to release the pastor.

An annual review is scheduled that includes discussion of potential succession.

Talking about succession needs to become a normal conversation between boards and pastors. Once it becomes a regular, anticipated part of a pastor’s tenure, anxiety levels drop, and clear thinking can lead to a plan before one is needed— and long before a situation reaches crisis level.

Finding and grooming leaders for succession is one of the chief tasks of leadership.

The age difference between the outgoing pastor and the incoming pastor is one of the biggest predictors of how much the congregation will change over the first several years of the new pastor.

When you’re ready to begin naming specific potential succession candidates, the best starting place is usually to look at “family” members, which are more formally defined as internal candidates. This is especially helpful when the church is healthy, growing, and wanting to continue its current DNA, mission, and path forward.

How strongly do you believe the legacy of your leadership significantly affects how well the ministry continues to thrive after you are gone? That legacy starts now, while you are still at the church, as you build a culture that values shared leadership, team development, and empowerment of others, both volunteer and paid. As Laurie Beshore at Mariner’s Church, Irvine, California, said, “Hire staff or recruit volunteers with your successor in mind. Always be on the lookout for your replacement.” 4

The bottom line: don't make it up as you go.

Our dream is that as board members figuratively look over their pastor's shoulder, they will pray through and process these important issues together.

The most expensive hire anyone can ever make is hiring the wrong person.

Smart churches will make every effort possible to mitigate the likelihood of a bad succession by planning early and reviewing often.

Each of these candidate explorations involved airfare or mileage, hotels, meals, rental cars, and other costs.

We estimate that time range to be from twelve to twenty-four months.

The biggest variable in succession plans is that during the many months between pastors, the church also loses its spirit of momentum.

Parting gifts to outgoing pastor or salary paid as part of separation agreement. When

Written separation agreements are typically useful. In positive good-byes, they help preclude misunderstanding. (Is the laptop computer the pastor's or the church's?) In strained relationships, they help preclude further tensions and also make necessary legal statements. They also help anticipate the unexpected. Separation agreements contain language about speaking well of each other, families included, so if the pastor's teenage son or daughter begins writing nasty things about the church on Facebook, then the final payments to the outgoing pastor can be paused until that situation is remedied. Separation agreements should always be written and signed by both parties after a period of review.

Email [support@vanderbloemen.com](mailto:support@vanderbloemen.com) to get started; also see "What Our Organizations Can Do for You"

Ongoing support or salary.

Weekly preacher/ teacher.

Travel related to interviewing candidates.

Moving costs for new pastor.

Higher salary for new pastor.

Updates to pastor's office and new equipment, such as a computer.

Dips in giving by the congregation.

Staff departures.

Search firm.

Advertising for the position.

Publicity costs.

Other consultants.

Pastor's fund.

Another expense to consider is insurance premiums.

The total cost of succession should lead churches to begin planning now; saving now, and forming a relationship now with outside entities that can help them navigate the succession process.

Proactively address succession issues before they occur.

Review existing employment agreements.

Assess your formal emergency succession planning.

Discuss how your church will address a planned departure of a pastor or senior executive.

Make sure governing documents, articles, and bylaws adequately express and empower the process your church will be engaged in and the people most involved.

Bring membership rolls and the list of corporate officers up-to-date.

Ensure that succession, whether internal or external, is based on performance and merit and not heredity.

Adequately address the broad range of departure issues and incoming leadership issues to avoid practical problems.

Have you addressed a sabbatical policy?

Work to ensure that the actual transfer of organizational control is effective. Communicate.

Create separation agreements and new employment agreements that follow legal best practices.

Finishing well is not just about you,

"Your church cannot be great if it cannot be great without you."

The single biggest reason organizational changes fail is that no one has thought about endings or planned to manage their impact on people. 8 His argument is that changes don't do you in. Rather, transitions do you in.

Change is situational.

Transition is psychological.

Ministry transitions today aren't much different. No matter how greatly anticipated the change, the question isn't really if dissatisfaction and opposition will arise; the question is when. Pastoral transitions are tough; there's no way of escaping it.

The first principle for a successful transition is this: honor thy predecessor.

Wise pastors choose to celebrate the great legacy inherited from one or more predecessors.

Most of the time, the seamlessness can be traced back to a key principle: when the past is honored, future possibilities are unlocked.

"This is bigger than me and if I don't have a responsible plan to move the congregation beyond me, then I'm not doing my task of ministering to this community." 20

"Achievement comes to someone when he is able to do great things for himself. Success comes when he empowers followers to do great things for him. But a legacy is created only when a person puts his organization into a position to do great things without him."

Good pastors focus their life on producing good fruit. But the greatest and most visionary pastors and church leaders share a common wisdom: they plan not just for their current "tree" but also for the time beyond their own tenure.

That perspective requires not weeks, not months, not even one or two years to develop, but rather a ministry attitude to start now and carry it forward in everything you do.

Thinking past our own careers, focusing on how we will pass the baton, planning for our own succession— these could be the markers of pastors interested in fruit for the kingdom. It is a fruit that will endure. As Jesus said, "I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit— fruit that will last" (John 15: 16).

The best way to run a race is to start with the end in mind.

"We tried to make this transition not about finding a man but about fulfilling a mission."

There is no success without succession.